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Newspaper: U.S. businessman claims to have hired Ki...

Newspaper: U.S. businessman claims to have hired King's assassin

NEW YORK (UPI) -- A retired U.S. businessman says he will tell the name of the real assassin of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. if granted immunity from prosecution, an English newspaper reported Sunday.

The Observer of London reported on its front page that James Earl Ray, imprisoned since 1969 for King's slaying, had nothing to do with the assassination of the civil rights leader.

The U.S. businessman, who is not named in the article, said he hired another man for the April 4, 1968, murder. The Observer said the man will share his information with a Memphis, Tenn., grand jury if it grants him immunity from prosecution.

Four others are seeking immunity as well in return for telling their part of the story, the newspaper said.

King was assassinated by a sniper while standing on the balcony of the Lorrain Motel in Memphis. Ray was convicted of the killing but has maintained his innocence.

According to the newspaper report, the businessman received $100,000 for organizing the conspiracy to kill King and paid $10,000 of that to the actual man who pulled the trigger.

Nothing is said of the assassin other than that he was a local man with a reputation as a sharpshooter.

The Observer said the businessman claims he was hired to run the operation by two men. One of those men still lives in Tennessee.

The other, now deceased, according to the newspaper was "a prominent local entrepreneur, associated with New Orleans...'New Orleans' can be read as a synonym for the Mafia."

The Observer spoke to Lewis Garrison, the lawyer for the five self- described conspirators, as well as private investigator Kenneth Herman, who is said to have interviewed all five about their roles in the fatal shooting.

Garrison is no relation to former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, whose view of the John F. Kennedy assassination was depicted in the film "JFK."

Continual digging by Ray's attorney, William Pepper, drove the five to believe they would soon be discovered, the Observer said, and they therefore opted to step forward and seek immunity from prosecution.

Through an agent, Pepper on Wednesday sought a Tennessee grand jury hearing in which he said the five names would be revealed and their confessions entered into the record.

Pepper was quoted by the Observer as saying, "I believe the trail ultimately leads back to the FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, and

particular associates of his in the business and intelligence communities. I am convinced that in the not-too-distant future the world will have a very good idea of who was really behind Dr. King's assassination."

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